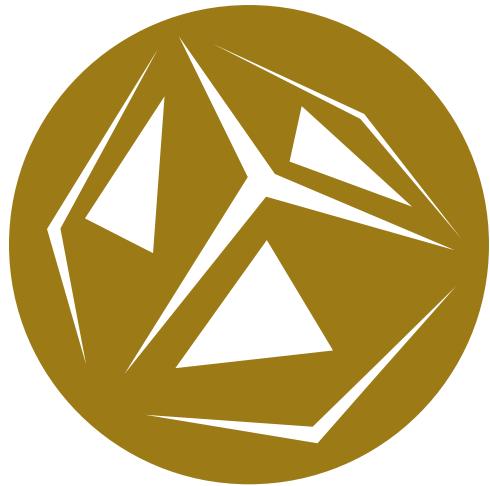


RollPlay



**GM NOTEBOOK
ISSUE FORTY-ONE**

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Hello Patrons!

It's the holiday season, and usually that means things are a bit quieter around old casa de RollPlay. We managed to finally air The Perfect Stone after months of planning - we've reprinted my prep for that one-shot here. This month, we had a Court of Swords live show and all the twists and turns that come along with that. I've included my prep for that episode as well as a bunch of behind-the-scenes photos from the event.

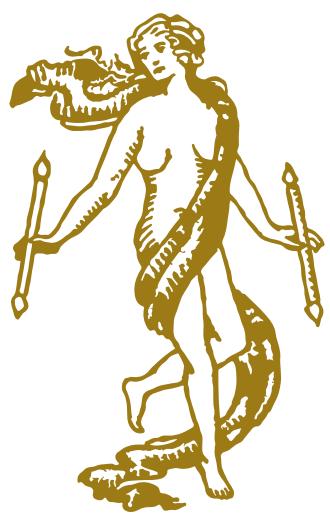
Happy Holidays, wishing you the best from me, JP and everyone on all your fave RollPlay shows! Thank you so much for your support, and welcome to Issue 41 of the GM's Notebook.

*Adam Koebel
RollPlay GM*



Table of Contents

The Perfect Stone: Character Notes	6
The Perfect Stone: Bonds and Sessions Notes	7
Court of Swords Live: Live Prep	8
Court of Swords Live: Live Notes	10
Court of Swords Prep: The Ignition	12
Court of Swords Live: Behind the Scenes	32



THE PERFECT STONE

ASA: Cleric, Dwarf ✓
MORGAN: Paladin, Human
DODGER: Wizard, Elf
JP: Thief, Halfling

Character Notes

- Magnus Igneous, dwarf cleric, old bald sad, 200ish (he/him)
 - worships a god of "what lies beneath" meaning rock + stone, honored by combat to prove strength
 - rewarded by god here and now
 - worshipped by dwarves, humans but not elves
 - rose through the ranks but left the church on a mission to find the perfect stone, in competition with others
 - old and somewhat traditional
 - a solitary wanderer, but used to be a fighter in the holy fights
 - the church is imploding due to introversion
 - has been on a three year journey so far
 - dreamt of the perfect stone
- Nip Nops, elfish wizard (he/him), recently arrested, prison elf
 - technically under "quest arrest"
 - attempted a theft (organizer) of spellbooks of forbidden magic (didn't know the contents)
 - Flipper Jipper (elf wizard) a much-beloved elf wizard who hates Nip Nops but secretly, sabotage
 - all elves can do magic, everyone else has to work for it
 - the spellbooks represent hidden-from-elves
 - her crew: twin human thieves, have not seen them, one of them or both: betrayal!
 - grew up in an elf town, but now other people live there too
- Mayfly, halfling thief (he/him)
 - halflings take names based on normal stuff, to make them blend in
 - halflings are just around, they have a secret origin that most people don't know
 - overlooked by most, not really known
 - Mayfly is a stand-out, not socially normal
 - bored of being dull or not interested
 - out for new experiences, not tied to outcomes
 - most valuable theft: a whole house, gave it back
 - always wanted to steal: someone's hearts desire (a perfect stone, perhaps?)
- Cassius, human Paladin (he/him)
 - father is an elder lawgiver, Cassius charged with enacting the law
 - royalty of a sort: the scion of an strange imperial house
 - Cassius' father is a living god, but Cassius is hearing another voice
 - his family's enemy, Cassius' brother who is envious

[dad: emperor dogmar
brother: douglas dogmar]

quest: hear the voice of the gods

THE PERFECT STONE

Bonds and Session Notes

Bonds:

- Mayfly has leads on the books
- Mayfly: Tia + Tamara hates but Nip Nops in the crossfire
- Mayfly is leading Magnus to the stone
- Cassius knows about the snitching
- Mayfly will play an important part in Nip Nops' story
- Nip Nops thinks Magnus is ill-informed about the world (religion = sucks)
- Nip Nops insulted the deity of Magnus, but we'll see how it goes
- Mayfly has been poisoning Magnus with Goldenroot, but trusts implicitly
- Cassius is curious about god, Magnus is teaching
- "worries about Nip Nops"
- Mayfly is a C1 to the Empire

Tim

16 - 12
12 - 2
6hp
(1hp)

Tia + Tamara stole the stone from the PCs to deliver it to Douglas, so he could become more powerful than his father, even.

They're hiding in Lawfield, whose mayor, Robert Manypouches, treats the town like a personal resort, bilking religious pilgrims headed for the Deep Below, a sacred coven where Douglas will use the stone to ascend to power.

begin with their arrival in Lawfield: who do they know here? Mayfly knows

[total time: 4 hrs (2h/2h)]

[Volochs]

. seeking the truth about the Emperor's power

nephew [Grovile Igneous]

The Olde Stone

Bridgette, an old dwarf

[Stronte + Selene, climbers]

Court of Swords Live: Live Prep



Count of Swords: Episode 13 //

5:00 | 7:00

what's currently going on:

- Vani wants to do the Firelord's bidding.
- A'nut wants to protect his people, so they can flourish.



- 1) Unnamed is dead (or, rather, a husk: an empty vessel without an animating force)
- 2) Bahath is the soul of a dragon, trapped in a greatsword
- 3) Vani, the shaman of Imix, can channel the power of Agni (aspect of the firelord) to perform a ritual to transfer Bahath into the body of Unnamed

- * Also, Berg wants help understanding his vulnerability to being possessed, etc. and find a way to resist it.

(Vani believes Imix could grant a blessing to Berg, but it would require that he forsake Heaven first, so she doesn't suggest it at first, only hinting, explaining there might be such things but focusing on him learning self-mastery.)

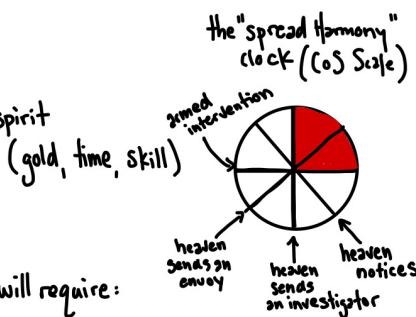
Ignition of the Flesh: in effect, the primordial spirit (soul-as-one) of the dragon, Bahath, is trapped in the greatsword. The ritual that Agni intends to perform will, instead, bind that spirit to the body of Unnamed, effectively awakening her and granting life. Some challenges:

- 1) the sword must be destroyed in a very specific way, so as to release the spirit without allowing it to dissipate
- 2) the captured soul must be implanted in Unnamed's shell, capturing it
- 3) Unnamed must overcome Bahath in a contest of wills.

- 1 requires a ritual space, magical materials and a means to capture the spirit
- 2 requires more or less the same things one would require for an enchantment (gold, time, skill)
- 3 demands VICTORY

> Vani/Agni can provide the ritual space and skill to perform the Ignition, but will require:

- 20,000 gp of raw magical materials, plus...
- a vessel suitable for containment of Bahath's essence
- a symbolic bridge, something that exists between flame + shadow
- a gift for the Firelord, to appease his anger @ the affront



(the intention behind this is basically to use the RITUAL move from Dungeon World; that anything is possible.)

"of course, we can attempt it with less, but I can't promise it'll work. Or if it does, I can't promise it'll stick"

- * part three is a battle inside the ritual's pocket dimension between Bahath and Unnamed, and the winner gets Unnamed's shell for themselves.
 - if Unnamed wins, darkness quashes the light, Bahath dies, splitting into a brand-new Hun/P'o pairing and making her "real"
 - if Bahath wins, Unnamed is destroyed + Bahath is trapped in her body...

Court of Swords Live: Live Notes



Court of Swords: 131 Live Notes

"Imix to Ignition"

- Korlon is smitten with Berg, wants to help him out if he can // "ate all the noodles + left me the broth"
- Gravedirt wants the Ignition ritual to create a single, p'ō-swollen monstrosity!
↳ she can already manipulate spirits, so this would be a big upgrade



who has money?

- the coffers of the Court of Coins
- the Necromancer King's war spoils
- the Hall of the Dwarves below
- ???
- the first scrying attempt FAILS



berg learns meditation
(wisdom saves)

[Magrai, the Northern Capital of the Court of Swords]

Special Projects Division - Court of Coins' magical research team

↓
(sending a liaison, an air genasi artificer, via teleportation)

"bureaucracy" the SPD has Berg's old heart, gained by their deal with Heaven.

- mention the overlay
- check goals
- the arrival of Mister Yang
- go go go

checks (11)
4 / 4 w
1 / 4 f

"the devil we know"

goals:

- Connect the PCs to the Agent of the Court of Coins Special Projects Division
- let/help them figure out the necessary reagents for the Ignition ritual
- perform the ritual itself, provided that the material is adequate + that UnNamed is able to overcome the imprisoned spirit of Baphath

What NPCs Want:

- A-Wut wants to keep his people safe (from the Mara, from the Counts, from Rambus, if necessary)
- Vani wants to help the PCs bring back UnNamed, but only really because it'll make sure she gets to be the fully-ascended Shaman of the Embers. If the Ignition works, embodying lost Primordials becomes possible...
- Imix wants to see if the ritual can work, so that Novum, one of his Aspects, can use it against their enemies (also, always, to burn)
- the Agent wants the details of the ritual for Court of Coins

* see the gdocs file for more prep!

[remarkable athlete]

AC 20	e1 (+02)	e2 (+02)	102
20 hp	98	70	
+20	95	56	
+30 +31	90	35	
134 +36	88	16	
	78	X	

Court of Swords Prep: The Ignition



Where We're At

THE PLAYERS

(CG) The Embers of Imix...

want to see a return of the Primordial order

want to see the Firelord ascendant

want to see Heaven and the Court structure toppled are allied with the PCs

(CN) The Bloody Scale Revenge Society...

want to kill all the servants of the Mara

want to kill all the servants of Heaven

don't care much about the Primordial Cults want to take back the land for the people neutral to the PCs (same enemy, different plans)

(LN) The Remnants of the Court of Swords
(Southern Wind, the Army, etc.)...

want to repel the Mara

want to restore law and order to the Court of Swords

want to reject foreign influence in the Court

want to rebuild

(CE) The Mara (The Great Green Worm)...

want to destroy The World

want to kill the Gods and topple Heaven

sink all beings into a morass of oblivion have agents in the World (Necromancer King and his army) are manipulating (or believe they are) the PCs

(LN/LE) The Court of Coins...

want to "restore order to the Court of Swords"

want to set things up so that they're on top (other Courts subservient)

install an Empire in place of the current system

want to repel the Mara

want to be chosen by Heaven

(LG) Heaven...

wants to Enlighten all humanity

wants to retain control of the world

wants to destroy or subjugate the Mara

wants to survive its own internal schisms

Player Goals

RAMUS (15)

- Secure land for the temple (Hard)
- Bring Unnamed Back to Life (Hard)
- ???

BERG (15)

- ???
- Find a way to resist future possession (medium)
- Help bring back unnamed (medium)

MAHARIB (15)

- Explore the power of the Wicked Edge (Medium)
- Find peace with what happened to Amira (easy)
- Ensure Unnamed is brought back (medium)

TEN PILLARS OF GOLD (13)

- See the ritual through, succeed or fail (easy)
- Return to Gravedirt with a newly Soul'd unnamed (medium)
- ???

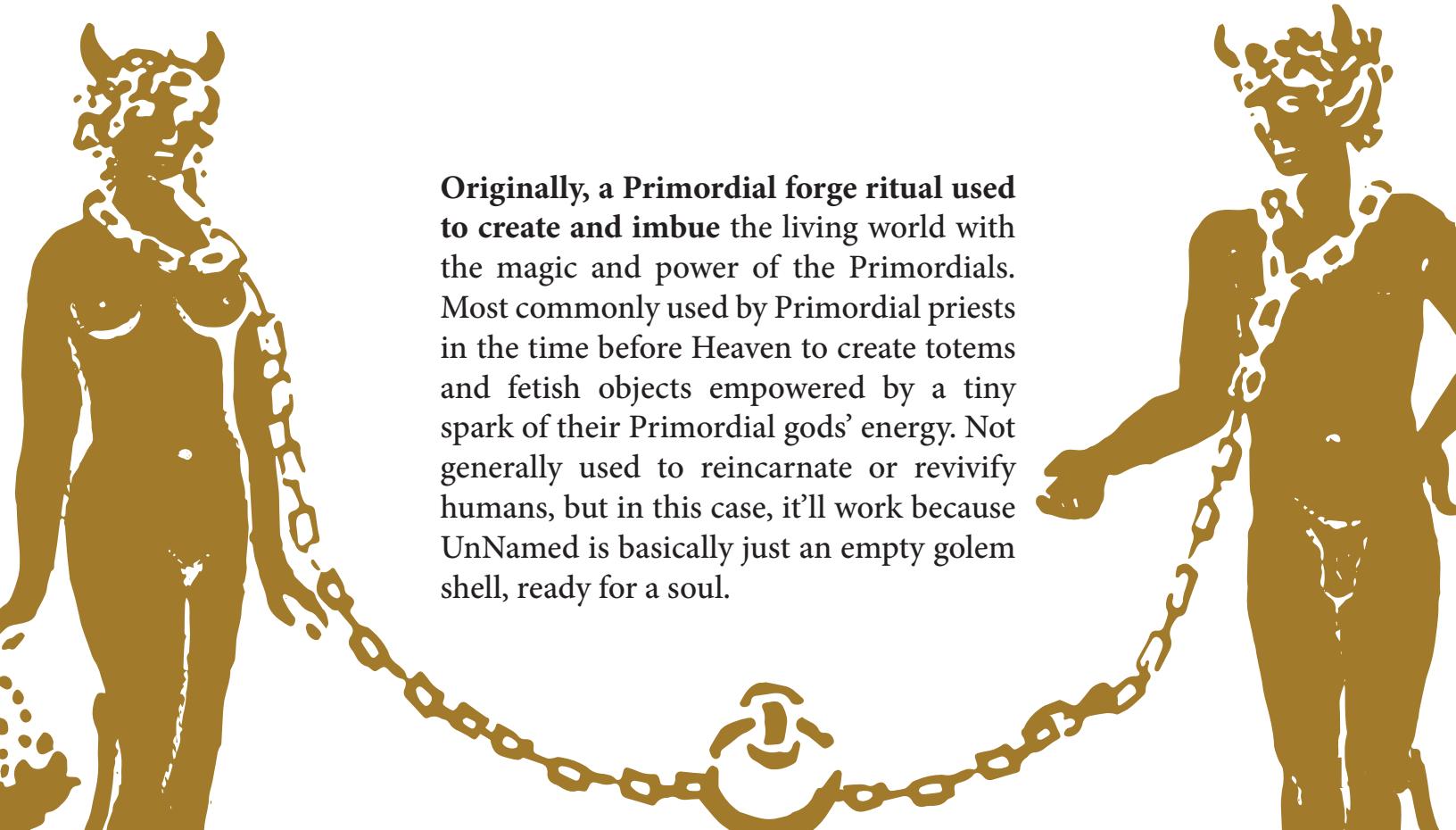
PRIMARY GOAL

- Restore UnNamed to life, whatever that looks like

SECONDARY GOAL

- learn about items and history (the Wicked Edge, the Regalia of Emperor Fei)
- Emancipate the Orcs
- Share the knowledge of the Ignition ritual with...?

The Ignition of Flesh



Originally, a Primordial forge ritual used to create and imbue the living world with the magic and power of the Primordials. Most commonly used by Primordial priests in the time before Heaven to create totems and fetish objects empowered by a tiny spark of their Primordial gods' energy. Not generally used to reincarnate or revivify humans, but in this case, it'll work because UnNamed is basically just an empty golem shell, ready for a soul.

Outcomes:

- assuming the ritual is performed properly, with the correct materials, the outcome will be one of the following

1. UnNamed defeats and does not spare Bahath

- a) We get a pure-Void creature in the form of UnNamed, a wound on the fabric of the World, a servant of the Mara entirely (one that is initially Fountain-allergic, and is detectable by her absence of a soul)

2. UnNamed defeats and spares Bahath

- a) The two merge, with UnNamed's memory-soul acting as a stand-in for the Hun and Bahath's primordial urges as the P'o. This creates a functionally "normal" tiefling, and UnNamed can join the civilizations of the living world.

3. Bahath defeats UnNamed, sparing her

- a) The two merge, with Bahath as the Hun and UnNamed as the p'o soul. This would mean UnNamed is essentially lost and a new shadow/dragon sorcerer entity is created, functionally a "normal" creature for the purposes of Heaven, etc.

4. Bahath defeats UnNamed, consuming her

- a) UnNamed is destroyed, Bahath becomes a self-sufficient, autonomous draco-golem in the body of a tiefling, a brand new entity such that the World has never seen before.

The Process and How To Perform It

- 1) Obtain the 20,000gp worth of magical materials
- 2) Obtain a suitable essence container
- 3) Provide a battleground for the contest
- 4) Agni-as-Vani performs the ritual
- 5) UnNamed must contest with Bahath for control

Materials

- 1) Materials
- 2) 20,000gp worth of magical crap
 - a) scavenge the money from the dungeons below the Fortress
 - i) no change in **LOYALTY**
 - b) borrow or get the money from The Agent / the Court of Coins
 - i) This means **LOYALTY TO COURT OF COINS**
 - c) get the money from the Mara
 - i) This means +/- **LOYALTY TO THE MARA** (steal vs. trade)
- 3) The vessel for the spirit Bahath
 - a) ??? it's up to the players to decide what this looks like / is
- 4) A sacrifice to Imix
 - a) ???
- 5) The battleground, touched by flame and shadow
 - a) ???

The Money

- 1) The Agent can just give it to them, but they won't unless they give up the secrets of the Ignition ritual.
- 2) They can bargain with Grave Dirt for the money and materials, which as a necromancer, she has ready access to, but she won't trade it for anything less than the secrets of the ritual.
- 3) They can rob Grave Dirt, stealing the money and the materials from her personal stores and / or from the temple itself (there are treasures in the temple sanctum yet unstolen)
- 4) They can plumb the depths of the dwarven ruins and get the money like adventurers

The McGuffins

Essentially, the other three items are up to the players to decide what they are, and for me to wing it based on what they suggest.

The Agent

Agent Yang is a member of the Court of Coins Special Projects Division, who deal with magical threats, cosmological risks and other dangers to the sanctity and safety of the people of the Court of Coins. They're basically the NSA to Ten Pillars' CIA agent. Yang has access to considerable resources and is a skilled magician themselves.

Their goal in coming to the Embers is to "support" Ten Pillars of Gold's peace mission but REALLY they want to see what kind of lost magical ritual that Pillars has unearthed.

Three Things about Agent Yang

- 1) arrogant and self-assured
- 2) never entirely honest with anyone
- 3) inexhaustible supply of curiosity

Agent Yang wants...

...to learn the secrets of the Ignition ritual and bring it back to the Court of Coins so as to increase their own cache in that organization

To Get It, They...

use indirect political and economic influence (state-sponsored deep pockets and lots of secret friends and allies) and direct magical intervention (they're a powerful artificer in their own right)

Actual Prep Required:

- NPC stats for Agent Yang
- a map of a level of dungeon under the Fortress
- a battle between Bahath and UnNamed
- a map of anywhere in the Monastery the PCs might end up fighting

Side Quests



Berg Learns to Protect His Agency

(Berg, sick of being captured, enslaved, possessed, ridden like a cheap horse, abused and robbed of agency, is finally sick of it all and ready to learn to protect himself)

- Vani teaches a semi-magical process of meditation and inner calm
- Berg's own rage should be explored and analyzed during this quest
- This arc is about who Berg is, what makes him Rage, and how Heaven figures into the whole thing.
- Thematically, overlaps with the ideas of destiny and choice, and of free will and what it means to people who do not have it.

The Spread of Harmony Among the People of the Court of Swords

(Long-term goal of Ramus Krill, in which the Cult of Harmony is spread from Ramus and Somchai to the rest of the Court)

- starting grassroots, gaining followers this way
- opposed by Heaven and the Mara alike
- neutral for now to the Primordials, but ultimately opposed there as well
- long-game situation ultimately the resolution of which will be a main theme of the end game

Lore-Checking Magic Items In Our Possession

- Primarily a focus on the Regalia of Emperor Fei or the Wicked Edge of the Void

- The Wicked Edge

- a semi-sentient, possessed of a feral instinct and a desire to see the will of the Great Green Worm done (which is to say, ultimately, it intends to fail its wielder at the moment of truth, since it was forged to protect Ramus but the Worm needs Ramus to die, in the end)

- crafted of void material, forgotten memories of weapons, death and murder and empowered by a sliver of the will of the Great Green Worm itself

- could be, with time and discipline, broken from the control of the Mara Overlord - it is separated from its master by much distance and energy, the Fountain is absolutely messing with it.

- cannot be used to harm Ramus Krill directly, but otherwise is happy to spill blood, end lives and generally cause chaos and suffering as a side gig.

- The Regalia of Emperor Fei

- the three items belonging to Emperor Fei, enchanted by their use in the hands of that August Personage, bearing his stubborn strength and his imperial glory

- considered by historians to be either legendary and mythological, or at the very least lost to time

- if Agent Yang sees them, they will assume 1) they're fake or 2) try to get them back / become very interested in them

- reuniting the set will cause all kinds of chaos, as among the Court of Coins Fei and his myth is already leveraged as a political cry for a new Empire, and there are already prophecies and promises in place to reinforce this (again, ironically, setting Berg up as the "helpless chosen one")

- **The Apology of Emperor Fei**

- A warhammer, known also as the Hammer of Heaven and Tulpa's Conduit.
- Wielded by the Emperor in his Crusade of Ten Thousand Sighs, in which he “apologized” to the Dark King and his demonic followers.

- **The Pillars of the Gate**

- The mighty girdle who contains the strength and perseverance of the Emperor, who, it is said, held up the Gates of the city by himself for 16 days and 16 nights as the people of the city fled from the demons attacking them.

- **The Vault of Heaven's Wisdom**

- Representing the period of peace following the war, and leading up to the unification of the Courts, during which Fei stepped down as Emperor and ascended into Heaven as a divine saint.

Who Do We Love?

(the ritual itself is fundamentally one of enslavement - a soul with agency is forced to submit to another)

- semi-passive quest in that I'm just really curious who'll end up getting to learn what the ritual can do. Essentially, it's a Primordial-hunting magic-item creating ritual that would be MASSIVELY useful to the Mara or to Heaven.
- The Mara could use this ritual to entrap Primordials and Gods in weapons and armor and use those to further their slaughter campaign.
- The Gods could use this ritual to entrap Primordial or Mara (?) and further their hold on The World
- Anyone could use it to subjugate, imprison or otherwise destroy their enemies.

The Dwarven Vault



Below the Fortress, as-yet unclaimed Dwarven ruins contain secrets and treasure, and while we could theoretically make this whole thing a big dungeon, nobody has time for that. So instead, we'll make a roll to elide the engagement, ask some questions, and then present the vault itself.

The vault contains the treasures of Queen Elaheh XII, last queen of this stronghold, an ancient temple and worship-hall of Zark, an earth-and-metal Primordial and ancient enemy of Imix. Legend goes that Zark and his dwarven goons tricked the Embers in the ancient past, binding the ability to control fire and use it to forge weapons and armor. Imix has always hated them for this, and Zark has always thumbed their nose at Imix's bad business sense.

The Journey

Choose someone to lead the journey through the caverns below the Fortress of the Embers of Imix. Have that person roll a Wisdom (Survival) check at DC 17 and consult the table.

Results:

Natural 1: Your journey was harrowing, roll all your hit dice and take half that much psychic damage and mark 2 level of exhaustion.

2-10: Mark 2 levels of exhaustion.

11-16: Mark a level of exhaustion.

17+: You arrive without any undue suffering.

Natural 20: The wonders of this place have left you invigorated, everyone take Inspiration and 2d10+ your CON bonus in temporary HP.

Stakes Questions



- Will Berg realize the Ignition Ritual is one of subjugation and enslavement?
- Will Berg, upon realizing that, do anything about it?
- Who, if anyone, will tell Berg about that, if he himself doesn't realize?
- What does Agent Yang believe about the current situation of the world? Are they an Imperialist or a Traditionalist?
- What is Harmony's dogma? What are the lessons of Ramus' new religion? What does it promise that Heaven, the Mara and the Primordial Cults do not?
- What will the Court of Coins (particularly the Imperialists) think when they learn the Regalia is 2/3rds recovered, and how will they attempt to get them back / manipulate or use Berg?



Special Rules



The Battle for UnNamed's Soul

The battlefield itself is protean and shifting, moving between shadow and flame. There are three states in which the battlefield can exist.

In each state there is a passive effect, a light quality and an active effect that occurs on a set initiative track. At 20, the battlefield shifts randomly, and remains in that form until the next 20.

Shadow

All light is dim light.

Flame

Light is considered “sunlight” and on a 20 on the initiative tracker, all participants make a DC 20 Con save or take $3d10+6$ Fire damage, save for half.

Harmony

No special effects, light is bright but not “sunlight”. While in this phase, dealing damage of any kind also deals that same amount of damage to you as Psychic damage.

If an outside party is somehow connected to the battlefield, they can, on their own initiative turn, as an Action, make a DC 18 Charisma check to alter the battlefield, moving it to whatever state they desire.

If Ramus is the bridge himself, he can make this roll. If they have not appeased Imix, he might influence the battle himself.

The Dwarven Vault

Before they go in, the Embers warn that the Dwarves left behind magical threats that they cannot fight - these Dwarves were old enemies of the Embers and of Imix, and they worshipped an elder earth and metal primordial now long forgotten. As a result, their servants were designed to combat those who serve the Firelord. The Embers cannot press forward into the vault alone...

Lava flowing in the Vault deals 10d10 damage to anyone who touches it, and deals 18d10 to anyone fully submerged in it.

Lair Actions for the Vault Guardian

On Initiative count 20 (losing Initiative ties), the guardian takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; the dragon can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

If there are not already 2 Fire Elementals in play, the Guardian may use a Lair Action to summon a new Elemental, which spawns on one of the two remaining braziers. Each brazier can conjure and maintain a single elemental, and if they are destroyed, each reduces the total count.

(Each brazier has an AC of 18 and 50 hp and is immune to psychic, poison and fire damage and vulnerable to thunder damage)

A bubble of magma erupts from any square containing it within 120' of the Guardian, splattering everyone within 5' with hot lava. Make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw or take 6d10 fire damage.

A cloud of toxic gas erupts from a point within 120' of the Guardian, the cloud is 20' radius and heavily obscures vision. Anyone who enters the cloud for the first time on their turn or begins their turn there makes a DC 19 Con save or take 3d8+3 poison damage and suffer the poisoned condition until the end of their next turn. The cloud lasts until the next Lair Action is used.

Treasure in the Vault

The vault itself contains 30,000gp in art objects, gems, gold, and other liquid treasure. This is obviously enough to make the magical requirements and have some change left over. It also contains several magical items, left over from the Dwarves that once held this place.

- 8 potions of healing
- 2 potions of supreme healing
- spell scroll: dominate monster
- spell scroll: shape stone
- Bowl of Commanding Fire Elementals (**Imix's Folly**)
- Adamantine Armor (Breastplate) (**Unyielding Steel of Deep-King Zarkh**)
- Rod of Lordly Might (**The Edict of Queen Elaheh XII**)
- Immovable Rod (**Dwarven Stubbornness**)
- Robe of Eyes (**Ac-Menateh's Unbroken Vigilance**)

Court of Swords Live: Behind the Scenes





Zeke



Scoots JP



Max



Dan

